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BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF RALPH ERSKINE.

RALPH ERSKINE was son to the Rev. Henry Erskine, of Chirnside, Berwickshire. He was born at Monilaws, Northumberland, on the 15th March, 1685, O.S.; and was upwards of four years younger than his distinguished brother, Ebenezer Erskine, the father of the Secession Church. His father died when he was eleven years of age; but he enjoyed for many years the pious counsels of a valuable mother. Ralph exhibited early indications of piety and talent; and it was determined to give him an education adapted to the ministry. After acquiring the elements of literature at Chirnside, he entered the University of Edinburgh in November, 1699, in the 15th year of his age.

When a very young boy, he was the subject of strong religious impressions. At that early period, he strenuously addicted himself to the habit of prayer. One day, on his way to school, amusing himself with some school-fellows, in rolling stones down from the summit of a hill, he was seized with a violent pain in his arm: his conscience smote him for the neglect of prayer that morning. Home he immediately returned, went to his closet, confessed his sin, and prayed that God would pardon him, and heal his arm. What does his biographer state? Before he finished, he felt his arm perfectly well. "This," it is added, "endeared the throne of grace to Ralph, and induced him ever after to pour out all his complaints, and cast all his cares on God, who is the hearer of prayer." What weak, vain, childish enthusiasm, some reader may exclaim! We may misinterpret the interpositions of Providence, I admit. But if there is a particular providence, there are such interpositions. Prayer does not instruct God, or change his mind; but it is his eternal decree, that not only

is it a general truth, but true in particular instances, that the interpositions of his providence are connected with the prayers of his people. Does not inspiration assure us, that "the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up?" The angel of the Lord miraculously liberated Peter from prison; this might have been done without prayer; but we read that prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. It is not true that the same interpositions of Providence would take place without prayer, which take place with it. As to the particular instance before us, to say that the same event, to use the language of Dr. Gray, of Baltimore, in his *Theological Review*, "would have taken place without prayer, is a conclusion which no man is entitled to draw, because no man can be sure of the fact." This remark applies to all cases of this class, many of which are recorded in the lives of men eminent for prayer.

Mr. Fraser mentions another case with regard to Ralph Erskine, in after life. He had been requested by an afflicted friend to pray for him, but the request escaped his memory for a time. Recollecting it, however, during the night, he rose out of bed, and made supplication. The individual recovered; and at the very hour that prayer was made for him, obtained relief. This *might* have been without prayer, it is true, but who can say that it would?

In his diary, bearing date November 22, 1731, he thus speaks of his remembering with gratitude before God, the spiritual exercise of his heart at the time of his father's death, when he was but eleven years old—"I took special notice of the Lord *drawing out my heart towards him at my father's death.*"

During his first session at College, in 1700, his life was providentially saved. The Parliament Square in which he lodged, was nearly destroyed by fire; and he narrowly escaped being burned to death, having forced his way through the flames with a number of his books. Beloved books, to be so valued!

At college, he pursued his studies with ardour and success. To good natural abilities, he added a zealous and patient assiduity in the acquisition of knowledge. A memorandum book still remains, which exhibits ample proofs of the proficiency which he made in the acquisition of philosophy and the languages, while it bears the pleasing impress of a pious mind, recognizing God in all its pursuits.

Theology presented a field peculiarly congenial to a mind

so active and devout as his. The ministerial office seems to have peculiarly shaped the whole course of his preparatory studies. There still exist in the hands of his descendants twenty manuscript volumes, containing extracts from religious books, made in the course of reading, a few transcripts of manuscript sermons, but chiefly notes of sermons preached in his hearing, and taken down during delivery. A large portion of these discourses were preached at communions; and he appears to have been in the habit of frequenting sacramental solemnities in various places, where he both partook of the Lord's Supper, and enjoyed the preaching of the most eminent divines of the day. The evangelical and powerful discourses which he heard on these occasions, as Mr. Fraser shows by copious extracts from his diary, made lively impressions on his heart, and were often called to remembrance with gratitude and delight in after life.

During the latter years of his preparatory studies, he was tutor and chaplain in the house of Colonel Erskine, of Culross—a man of congenial mind—a genuine Presbyterian—a man of piety and patriotism—one of the worthies of that period—one who had been active in the Revolution, and grandfather to the celebrated Dr. Erskine, of Edinburgh.

On the 8th of June, 1709, he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Dunfermline; and on Tuesday, the 14th, he preached his first sermon in public, at Culross, from 2 Cor. iii. 5—"But our sufficiency is of God." On the 7th August, 1711, in consequence of a unanimous call from the congregation of Dunfermline, he was ordained to the pastoral office, as colleague and successor to the Rev. Mr. Buchanan, in the 27th year of his age, and nearly eleven years after his brother Ebenezer's settlement at Portmoak.

Though the junior of Ebenezer, and his inferior in genius, Ralph had the advantage of his brother in a more early and clear acquaintance with the peculiarities of the gospel plan of salvation, through the covenant of grace. When the account of Ralph's death reached him, Ebenezer exclaimed, "And is Ralph gone? He has twice got the start of me; first in Christ, and first in glory." To Ralph, together with his own wife, Ebenezer, after he had been four years a minister, owed, as he has recorded in his own diary, his first clear insight into the gospel plan of salvation, and a saving acquaintance with its influence. A confidential conversation, between his brother and his wife, on their religious experiences, was accidentally overheard by Ebenezer. They were imparting their sentiments

and feelings to each other without reserve, in a bower in the garden, unconscious of being heard by any human ear. From the window of his study, which overlooked the bower, and which happened to be then open, he eagerly listened to their interesting communications. He felt, from what he heard, that they were in possession of an invaluable something—"the secret of the Lord"—a vital principle of heart christianity, to which he was a stranger. The impression stuck, and wrought in him; and if any inquire what were its fruits, we say, look into his sermons—look at the revival and reformation of religion, which it pleased God to work by his hands.

Ralph Erskine's attachment to study, after his ordination, continued cordial and persevering. In general, he wrote out his sermons fully. They were the fruit of much reflection and care; and were decidedly evangelical, experimental, and useful. He was possessed of excellent pulpit talents, having a pleasing voice, and an engaging, winning manner. He excelled in making free offers of Christ and salvation to sinners, and in the power with which he urged their acceptance. He had a singular faculty of speaking to the experience, consciences, cases, and circumstances of his hearers. On sacramental occasions, he was attended by crowded audiences from other parishes, and remote parts of the country. Even strangers from distant parts of the kingdom flocked to Dunfermline on these solemnities; and to their dying day were accustomed to speak in the warmest manner of the delight and benefit which they received from the communion sermons of Ralph Erskine. On these occasions, the crowd of worshippers from other places was so great, that to accommodate them all with lodgings was impossible, and not a few would spend the whole night in the church yard, or on the banks of the adjoining rivulet, in pious conference and prayer.

The following incident advantageously exhibits the humility, as well as zeal and compassion of Mr. Erskine. A man had been condemned to suffer death for robbery. After having repeatedly visited him in prison, on the business of his salvation, he attended him on the scaffold. Mr. Erskine addressed both the criminal and the spectators, and concluded by laying his hand on his breast, and uttering these words—"But for restraining grace, I had been brought, by this corrupt heart, to the same condition with this unhappy man."

In the public transactions of the Church, Ralph Erskine uniformly supported the rights of the people, ecclesiastical purity, soundness in the faith, and the principles embodied in the

Westminster Confession, Presbyterian form of Church Government, and the Solemn League and Covenant. In the year 1712, when the abjuration oath—a fertile cause of animosity and dispute,—was imposed by the ruling powers, he, in company with his brother Ebenezer, and about one-third of the ministers, refused to take that oath, on the ground, that it seemed to imply an approbation of prelacy, and an owning of the English Established Church—the security of that Church being one avowed design of the oath, and the Act of Parliament imposing it, providing that the king should always be of the prelatical establishment. The refusal of this oath exposed the nonjuring brethren to ejection from their churches, and a fine of £500. So much for the sort of nursing bestowed by the statesmen of those days on the English Episcopal Church. So much for their heartless and tyrannical invasion of the consciences and liberties of Scottish Presbyterians.

At the accession of George I. to the British throne, Ralph Erskine, as might be naturally expected from his principles, supported the House of Hanover, in opposition to the tyrannical and persecuting House of Stuart. During the rebellion of 1715, he zealously resisted the Pretender, and from the pulpit animated the zeal of those who stood forward in defence of our civil and religious liberties.

From the commencement of his ministry, he took a decided part in the doctrinal discussions which were then keenly agitated, and which terminated in the Secession. With Boston, Hogg, his brother Ebenezer, and others, he resisted the *Neonomian*, or legal doctrine, then and since so banefully prevalent, which represented the Gospel as a *new law*, softened down to meet human infirmity, as it was glossingly called, and requiring, as the conditions of salvation, faith, repentance, and sincere, though imperfect obedience. He and his friends, on the contrary, taught that Jesus Christ having fulfilled the condition of the Covenant of grace by his obedience and sufferings unto death, a foundation is laid for the offer of a free, full, present, and everlasting salvation to sinners. Faith and repentance, they taught, were a *part* of our salvation, and the work of the Holy Ghost in the heart, thereby restoring the soul to the moral ability for holy obedience. Accordingly, in the controversy which was so keenly agitated respecting the book entitled, “*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*,” and when the dominant party in the General Assembly had actually prevailed to procure an act condemnatory of that work, and several precious truths of the Gospel taught in it, he was found

fighting by the side of his distinguished friends. That God has made a free gift of his Son to sinners, warranting all to come to him for salvation—that no qualifications are necessary to entitle the sinner to come to Christ—that believers, though under a law to Christ, are released from the law, as a covenant of works made with Adam, as the federal head and representative of his posterity—that salvation, with all its varied blessings, can flow to sinners through the channel of the Covenant of grace *alone*, made between the Father and the Son, as the head and representative of “God’s elect;”—these were truths for which Mr. Erskine and his associates stood up with a boldness and intrepidity which deserve the gratitude of all who feel their salvation bound up in the doctrines of grace, and who feel that to preserve, and propagate, and transmit them pure and entire, is the most precious trust God has committed to the present generation. Mr. Erskine and his friends were abundantly reviled from the pulpit and press—particularly in synod sermons and scurrilous pamphlets, as Antinomians, enemies of the law of God; whereas it would be easy to prove, that the real Antinomians are such as represent the law as softened down to meet the infirmities and incapacity of the sinner, because this would be to set aside the purity, the excellence, and eternal obligation of the law, and represent it as binding no farther than suits the inclination of the depraved creature! The doctrine of justification by faith maintains and establishes the law. Legalism, and not grace, is the real Antinomianism. In defence of the doctrines of grace, Mr. Erskine published several controversial tracts. For a clear exposition of his views, however, the general reader is referred to his “Gospel Sonnets,” particularly the sixth book, which treats of the difference and harmony between the law and the Gospel—the ground of the sinner’s justification, and the distinction between justification and sanctification. His published sermons, especially those entitled, “Christ’s the People’s Covenant,” “Receiving Christ, and Walking in Him,” “The Death of Legal Hope,” “The Law, the Strength of Sin,” deserve to be consulted by all those who desire to find a thorough exhibition of gospel truth, in opposition to *legal* error.

When Professor Simpson was arraigned for venting Arian and Pelagian heresy, Ralph Erskine was one of those who zealously exerted themselves to rouse the reluctant church courts to arrest the contagion by the exercise of proper discipline. The Deity of the Redeemer, and the other glorious truths which centre and clustre around it, were abundantly asserted by Mr.

Erskine from pulpit and press. His sermons and gospel sonnets are rich with the sterling gold of christian doctrine. The Deity of the Redeemer he felt to be a vital point, and he preached, and wrote, and sung, in the spirit of his own energetic lines—

“ Down Arian pride to him shall bow—
He’s Jesus and Jehovah too.”

In July, 1714, Mr. Erskine was married to Margaret Dewar, who died in the thirty-third year of her age, after living with him 16 years, and having borne him ten children, five of whom died before her. In 1732, he was married to Margaret Simpson, who was the mother of four sons, only one of whom reached maturity. She survived her husband a few years.

We come now to consider the part which Ralph Erskine took in the Secession. A vigorous opposition had been made, for a series of time, by a faithful minority, against the doctrinal defection, and corrupt administration of a prevailing party in the Church courts. Matters came to a decided rupture, in consequence of the Synod of Perth and Stirling passing censure on Ebenezer Erskine, for a bold and manly exposure which he made of the wickedness of church courts forcing the ordination of ministers against the minds of the people, and succumbing to the sacrilegious usurpation of the right of church members electing their pastors, made by the British Parliament. He was found guilty of the *atrocious crime*, forsooth, of “impugning several acts of Assembly, and proceedings of church judicatories;” just as if the difference between this sapient Scotch Synod and his Infallibility of Rome consisted in this, that while the Pope asserted that he *could* not err, they took it for granted that they never *did*. The General Assembly, to which Ebenezer Erskine appealed, confirmed the sentence of the Synod; and because he refused to withdraw his protest against this act of Assembly, and so stand up before the whole world, and to all future time, a self-owned craven and hypocrite, to the violation of all truth, justice and conscience, he must be thrust out of the ministry. He, and the friends who stood by him, had but one refuge—they must come out of Babylon. The Secession was accordingly declared; and the first Presbytery was constituted on the 6th of December, 1733. As yet, Ralph Erskine had not formally joined the Secession. But his heart was with them.

They had his mind and his prayers; and he usually attended their meetings.

He had hoped that the Assembly might be induced to retrace their steps, and set about some decided course of reformation; but after a delay of upwards of three years, and perceiving that the dominant party, though checked and awed for a time, had swept on in as headlong a course of defection as before, and had even become more obstinate and exasperated by the success and popularity of the Secession, Ralph Erskine joined the Secession on the 18th Feb., 1737.

Ralph Erskine shared largely in the labours and sufferings of his brethren. He was too conspicuous a character to escape that resentment and persecution, by which the outrages of ecclesiastical faction, have, in all ages, scandalized the religion of Christ. His character set malignity at defiance, but he could be cast out of the synagogue, and was, moreover, assailable in the point of worldly support. He and his brethren were accordingly libelled before the assembly, in 1739. Here they appeared in a constituted Presbytery; and in a powerful document, entitled the DECLINATURE, they solemnly disowned the jurisdiction of the Assembly, and assailed its corruptions with all the moral force of truth, intrepidity, and dignity. The wrath of the Assembly was restrained for the time; and it was not until the following year, 1740, that a sentence of deposition was past on the eight Secession brethren. Whether from confusion or design, that sentence was exceedingly ambiguous. "They depose them," it ran, "from the office of the ministry, prohibiting them to exercise the same within *this church*;" leaving it to be interpreted, of unministering them altogether, or unministering them only so far as related to the exercise of their office in *this church*—*this church*, as pompous ecclesiastics are fond of phrasing it, *churching* themselves, and *secting* all others.

The great majority of his congregation, and the most of his elders concurred with Ralph Erskine, in espousing the cause of the Secession. Previously to his being thrust out by the Assembly of 1740, he took to the open air, like Whitfield, and preached to multitudes, in a green at Dunfermline; whilst he continued, on another part of the Sabbath, to officiate in turn in the parish church. In anticipation, however, of being ejected by ecclesiastical anathema, and the secular arm, collections were raised with great alacrity and spirit, for the erection of a meeting-house; or, as the taste of the present age delights to call the building where the church assembles—a church.

The subscription was so liberal and so general, that Mr. Erskine states in his diary, that it was "astonishing, both to friends and enemies." A large church, or meeting-house, if it be wrong to call a house a church, was speedily erected in Queen Ann-street, Dunfermline, capable of accommodating two thousand people. Here he continued to officiate, with great acceptance and success, in the midst of a large and attached congregation, till called to the service of the Upper Sanctuary.

Though nominally sentenced by the Assembly of 1740, not to minister in "*this* church," he continued to officiate in the parish church, with his colleague, Mr. Wardlaw, until the death of that individual, in 1742. This was owing to the secular arm, to which the Secession brethren were kindly handed over, not being so zealous in Dunfermline, as in Stirling and other places, and as was especially its wont, when persecution was fashionable, to carry into effect the decrees of the church. The Assembly of 1742, after the true priestly fashion, were so kind, in their tender mercies, as to jog the memory of the magistrates, and Mr. Erskine felt it to be his duty to withdraw in peace.

The fame and influence of Ralph Erskine was extended by the Secession. The cause, involving the doctrines of grace and the rights of the christian people, carried with it the good will of a large portion of the Scottish people. It struck its roots into all parts of the land. The harvest truly was great, but the labourers were few. Mr. Erskine's reputation was already high, as an able divine and powerful preacher; he was known extensively and favourably as an author, by the publication of various pamphlets, sermons, and his "Gospel Sonnets." His eloquence and services were, therefore, often called into requisition, on the occasion of sacraments, ordinations, fasts, supplying vacancies, planting new congregations, and general preaching tours through different districts.

In connexion with the Secession, the word of the Lord mightily grew and prevailed. The body soon became so large as to consist, in 1745, of three Presbyteries—Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dunfermline; having under their care thirty congregations, and sixteen vacancies, besides several congregations in Ireland, planted in this kingdom, in consequence of petitions from the people here, who had felt aggrieved with the Arian and legal doctrines, which lamentably infected too many of the Presbyterian pulpits of Ulster. On the first of March, 1745, the first Synod was held in Stirling, on which occasion, Ralph

Erskine was chosen Moderator, and at the second meeting, in the same place, in the September following, he opened the Synod by preaching from Eph. iv. 8.

Ralph Erskine participated with his brethren in public Covenanting. Not only did the Secession, but Presbyterians generally, regard with veneration the solemn League and Covenant, which their fathers, throughout the three kingdoms, had entered into at a time of imminent peril, as a bond defensive and protective of their religion and liberty, and pledging themselves to endeavour the reformation of religion, by the "extirpation of popery, prelacy, heresy, and profaneness." Not satisfied with owning the obligation of the Covenant, and reviving the work of public covenanting, the Associate Presbytery at first carried the matter to an extreme, by resolving and making the actual swearing of the bond, a term of christian communion; but Brown states, that they were convinced of the error of this, and both he and Gib contend, that it was never acted on. The great objection made to the Covenant, arose from the use of the word "extirpation," as if this sanctioned persecution; but extirpation is to be understood in a moral sense, not of persons, but of principles. We contend for the morality of Covenanting as an occasional duty, demanded by circumstances, in Providence. We approve of the method adopted by christian reformers of former times for mutual excitement and encouragement, by solemn confederation and vows to God. We own the obligation of the Covenants, and feel ourselves under high obligation to maintain and prosecute the work of reformation, in consequence of what the Reformed Church has done; but we abhor the idea of propagating reformation, or even christianity; of extirpating popery, prelacy, heresy, or paganism, by carnal weapons, as wholly opposed to the word and spirit of Jesus Christ; "for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." The Erskines never approved of enforcing religion or reformation, by civil pains and penalties. "I have sometimes thought," says Ebenezer Erskine, in a letter of his, published with his consent, by Mr. Wilson, another of the founders of the Secession, "the civil constitution was too much blended with the affairs of Christ's kingdom in their public engagements; as also, that the way of forcing people, was not the way to make proselytes unto Christ, the weapons of whose kingdom are not carnal, but spiritual, suited unto the soul and spirit, where his kingdom is principally established." The judicial testimony of the Associate Presbytery

in 1736, expresses approbation of the Covenants being, as to their matter, scriptural and right; as to the end, laudable and necessary; as to the time, seasonable. At the same time, it states, "It must be acknowledged, that the enforcing of religious duties with civil penalties, and in too many instances, blending the affairs of Church and State with one another, is totally inconsistent with the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom."

In consequence of numerous and pressing applications, the Secession adopted the measure of sending out individuals as missionaries, as they would now be called, generally two and two, as Christ sent his disciples, to preach the gospel in various districts of the land. In these missionary tours, it appears from his diary, that Ralph Erskine was much employed. He often preached in fields to vast multitudes. Of the impression produced by his preaching, he himself thus writes in a letter to the celebrated John Wesley, who was about commencing his career at the same time in England—"The outward appearances of people's being affected among us, in time of preaching, and especially on sacramental occasions, may be reduced to these two sorts. One is, hearing with a close, silent attention, with gravity and greediness, discovered by fixed looks, weeping eyes, joyful or sorrowful-like countenances, evidencing tenderness in hearing. Another sort is, when the word is so affecting to the congregation, as to make them lift up their voice and weep aloud, some more depressedly, others more highly, and at times the whole multitude in a flood of tears; all, as it were, crying out at once, till their voice be ready to drown the minister's, so as he can scarcely be heard for the weeping noise that surrounds him. And though we judge that the most solid and judicious of the auditory, are seldom so noisy as the others, though perhaps more affected inwardly; yet of these that are thus outwardly affected, we conceive some to be under a more common, and others under a special gracious influence of the Spirit of God, which we can only know by the fruits and effects that follow. The common influence, like a land-flood, dries up: we hear of no change wrought: the other appears afterward in the fruits of righteousness, and the tract of a holy conversation. As to the impression the word makes upon those whom we take afterwards to be true converts, the degrees and duration of a law work, or conviction, are various, and the saving issue comes to be known also, at sundry times, and in divers manners. Some have been more quickly touched, and turned to the Lord

and his ways. Others have been many weeks, yea, months, if not years, under much heaviness, bondage, grievous terrors, and horrible temptations. Some relieved very gradually with a word now, and a word then, impressed upon them, and some outpouring of the spirit, now and then, and further degrees of illumination and divine teaching, till, by little and little, they have come to more establishment in the faith, and till they be brought off from all confidence, not only in their works and duties, in point of justification before God; but, also, from all confidence in, and dependence upon, their best frames, tears, enlargements, influences, and attainments, to a solid life of faith; upon the grounds that are unchangeable." In an address to his flock, he thus declared, "I never enjoyed more of God's presence and countenance in my public work, than since I was brought under *ecclesiastical sentences, and church persecutions.*"

While preaching in the open air, he sometimes experienced the annoyance of the rabble. On one occasion, at Braid's Craigs, near Edinburgh, a man, who was steward to a gentleman, set fire to the whins, with which the place abounded; and as the day was windy, it was an excellent plan for smoking and burning off the preacher, and the multitude which surrounded him. In Providence, the wind immediately turned in an opposite direction, and the assembly suffered no inconvenience. Erskine publicly observed, that the person who had been guilty of such a daring impiety, would perhaps live to repent of it. That man was three times burned out of house and home by fire. Two houses, which he occupied on Clerkington estate, were successively burned, when his master dismissed him, saying he would burn all the houses on his property. He removed to Preston-pans, where his house was again burned; and it is stated by Mr. Frazer, (p. 280) that a woman, ninety years old, very lately, perhaps still, alive in Edinburgh, affirms, that when she was a child, she narrowly escaped from the flames of that house, being let down from a window in a basket. "The events of Providence are not," as Mr. Frazer remarks, "to be interpreted with presumptuous boldness;" yet, there are instances in which daring impiety is followed by immediate and visible judgments, and men are compelled to exclaim, "Verily, there is a God, who judges in the earth."

The fame of the Secession was not confined to Scotland; it spread through the British empire. Being essentially orthodox, and thoroughly Presbyterian, it was espoused by a num-

ber of evangelical Presbyterians in Ireland and England; and many distinguished religious characters in England and in America, sympathising with the Erskines, in the great *work of converting sinners*, and asserting gospel truth, hastened to correspond with them by letter. Mr. Fraser gives some correspondence which Ralph Erskine had with Mr. Wesley. Gilbert Tennent, famous in the history of American revivals, in the name of an American Presbytery, congratulated the Associate Presbytery, on the stand which they had made. The most remarkable correspondence, however, was with the celebrated Whitfield; and as his difference with the Secession has been tortured into a matter of so much misrepresentation, and reproach on the cause generally, and Ralph Erskine in particular, it is necessary to state the real facts of the case. Whitfield opened the correspondence with the Erskines two years before his personal conference with them; and in his letters, spoke in the most ardent terms of his attachment to them, and declared his willingness, “to sit at their feet, and learn the way of God more perfectly.” The Erskines invited him to Scotland. Ebenezer’s letter is given by Mr. Fraser, and in it he states to the effect, that it would be unreasonable to expect that Whitfield should incorporate with the Associate Presbytery, and that it was far from their wish to limit his commission to preach the gospel to every creature; yet, as the Secession was eminently raised up of God, for the defence of truth and the conversion of sinners, it would be desirable that he would conduct his ministry, so as not to strengthen the hands of the corrupt clergy and judicatories of the established church, and “company with the Associate Brethren, and preach with and for them, and so weaken the enemies’ hand, and strengthen theirs in the work of the Lord, when the strength of the battle was against them.” See Life of E. Erskine, p. 426. Whitfield arrived in Scotland; but before he reached Ralph Erskine, Dr. Webster of Edinburgh, a man of great tact and cleverness, and several of his brethren of the Established Church, got round Whitfield, and represented matters to him in such a light, as induced him to declare, that he would connect himself with no party. He met, however, as he had previously agreed, the Secession Brethren at Dunfermline. The result was a decided split. They pressed on him the consideration of Presbyterian Church Government, representing to him the necessity of churches being organized, as well as converts made. Whitfield refused to take up the matter of Church Government; and with regard to any particu-

lar form, laying his hand on his heart, exclaimed, "I do not find it here." Mr. Moncrieff, who was of a warm temper, giving a rap on the Bible, which was lying on the table, replied, "But I find it here." Whitfield, in a letter which has been repeatedly printed, states, "that they desired him 'to preach only for them.' I asked them, 'why only for them?' Mr. Ralph Erskine said, 'they were the Lord's people.' I then asked, 'Whether there were no other Lord's people but themselves; and supposing all others were the Devil's people, they certainly had more need to be preached to.'" Something of this likely occurred; it is, like the novels, *founded* on fact; but it is gross caricature. It leaves a false impression. It is utterly impossible, that Ralph Erskine could have used the very words attributed to him. Neither he, nor any of them, could mean, that they were exclusively the Lord's people. He and they, doubtless, did wish to engage Whitfield's services, so as to advance decidedly the cause in which they were engaged. But was not this reasonable? Did they not know and feel their cause essentially to involve the purity of gospel truth, the conversion of sinners, and the rights of christians? Was it not for this that they were thrust out of the Church—were deprived of the maintenance they enjoyed by law—exposed to so much persecution, and slandered as disloyal, bigots, enthusiasts—men of persecuting principles, and bribed by the Pope to divide the Church of Scotland? Did they feel that their cause was the cause of truth—a cause on which they could take their stand before all the world, and before their eternity and their God? and would they have been possessed of common sense, common honesty or conscience, had they not endeavoured to secure the services of Whitfield, a man so eloquent, and so eminently owned of God to the conversion of thousands, but on such principles only, as would be in harmony with their views as Presbyterians, and attachment to the covenanted work of reformation. Whitfield was an Episcopalian, and had taken the oath of supremacy; but he had declared to Mr. Erskine, that he would not "submit to the same ordination again, for a thousand worlds:" and on this ground it was hoped, that he was not averse to Presbytery. But when Whitfield openly declared that he would connect himself with no party—that he would have nothing to do with church government, and avowed his aversion to the Solemn League and Covenant, the Associate Presbytery could have no public ecclesiastical connexion with him. "As a farther proof," says the *Christian Repository*, vol 4,

p. 551, "that Ralph Erskine did not use any such preposterous arguments, as those attributed to him; we have the best authority for saying, that nothing at all resembling them appeared in a full and accurate Minute of the Conference, made out at the time, and long preserved, but which has, at length, unfortunately disappeared."

Indeed, from the public avowal which Whitfield made of his determination to keep aloof from parties, and of his aversion to the question of church government, it would have been the height of impolicy and madness for Ralph Erskine and the Secession not to have disconnected themselves from him at once. They would have been digging the grave of their own cause. Had their honest and straightforward disposition, as well as policy not been opposed to an ecclesiastical connexion with him, after such a disclosure, the very persons who had managed to get the foreway of them with Whitfield, and who were forward to raise the cry of bigotry and intolerance against them, would have been the very first to have raised agitation against them for the opposite course; and scurrilous pamphlets and sermons would have been stuffed full of lying accusations of latitudinarianism, liberalism, uniting with an episcopalian, and shaking hands with prelacy. The charge of bigotry in this case comes with a very bad grace from members of the Established Church of England or Scotland. In England, Whitfield was excluded from the churches, and was publicly preached against. In Scotland, the anti-evangelic part of the clergy derided him as a mad enthusiast. Some of the Orthodox members of the Church of Scotland preached and wrote against Whitfield, and against their brethren for employing him, on the ground of his being an Episcopalian. The Rev. Mr. Bisset, of Aberdeen, prayed publicly that God would forgive the sin of Whitfield being allowed to preach in his pulpit, assigning as the reason, that he was a Curate of the Church of England. The Church of England regards the ministry of Dissenters, whether Presbyterian or Independent, as having no validity. The General Assembly has prohibited their pulpits from being opened to ministers of the Church of England—and, if we mistake not, they have made the same prohibition with regard to the Presbyterian ministers of the General Synod of Ulster.

On all such subjects great allowances should be made for times and circumstances. Reviewing the whole matter, though none more highly venerate the memory of Whitfield, as an eminent servant of Christ, than we do, yet we are of the mind, that it was for the good of the Secession in Scot-

land, that they had nothing to do with him; and we, at the same time, think there is much truth in what both Fraser and Chalmers observe, that the manner of their parting "left no credit to either party."

It is to be remarked, that the fame of Whitfield was not then established, as it is now. Opposite opinions and keen discussions respecting his merits, were agitated in all denominations. At a literary society, which Dr. Robertson, and Dr. Erskine, of Edinburgh, had formed, a debate was carried on with such zeal and asperity respecting Whitfield, that it occasioned the dissolution of the society, and a temporary interruption of friendship and intercourse between Dr. Robertson and Dr. Erskine.

Whitfield, who before had been extravagant in his praise of the Secession, now declared that it was "a Babel which would tumble about their ears." Having broken with the Secession, he was laid hold of by the Evangelic Clergy of the Establishment, both to do good, and as a weapon of agitation, and a good set-off against an alarming and hated Secession. Bisset, an established minister, of Aberdeen, thus expressed himself in a pamphlet—"I never expected that some ministers and elders would have given up their former contendings, and have employed and caressed a subverter of our [church] government *for this end, to break the Seceders.*" On the other hand, some Secession Ministers, giving way to resentment, instead of calmly exhorting their hearers to consistency of conduct, as sound Presbyterians, and as witnesses for church purity, indulged in invectives against Whitfield and the Established Clergy, which the injury meditated against them might palliate, but could not justify.

In 1745, Scotland was again convulsed by rebellion and civil war. Ralph Erskine zealously supported the House of Hanover. Attempts had been made to stir up persecution against the Erskines and the Seceders, by representing them as disloyal. The zeal of the Erskines and Seceders generally, during the rebellion, gave a practical refutation to this calumny. Their earnestness, perhaps over earnestness, to free themselves from the calumny of disloyalty, may have caused others again to represent them as loyal overmuch. All Seceders, however, who know their principles, wish to stand equally clear of sedition, and party spirit, on the one hand; and on the other, of giving any sanction to Popery or Prelacy, or the slavish and soul-debasing doctrine of passive obedience, and non-resistance; but endeavour, by all scriptural means, the

cause of reformation. And in doing so, God forbid that they should insinuate that their brethren of other denominations, are not as peaceable as they are.

The policy of Satan is to divide and conquer. Disunion and strife are and do his work. The Secession body, which had hitherto conducted their affairs, in the most trying circumstances, with singular wisdom and ability, making the ordinary allowance for human imperfections, became divided and dishonoured, by the rupture which took place in April, 1747, respecting the Burgess Oath. In some boroughs, this oath was put in order, to entitle to the civil privileges of the place—"I profess and allow within my heart, the true religion presently professed within this realm, and authorized by the laws thereof." One party understood this as referring to the religion as professed in the standard of the church, and they therefore saw no reason to object to it. The other party, understood it as referring to religion, as professed by an erroneous and corrupt establishment, from which they had come out. Understanding the matter thus differently, and personal irritation mingling in the controversy, the contention was so sharp, that like Paul and Barnabas, they separated, the one from the other. The Burgher body declared the other Synod's constitution null and void. The Anti-burgher party went so far, as to pass sentence of excommunication against their brethren. This was wrong in both. Their division was wrong. The simple rule laid down in such cases, according to the 14th of Romans, is to forbear, and for one to give up that which grieves the conscience of another. Ralph Erskine was one of those who took the Burgher side, and wrote several pamphlets in defence of that Synod. The breach, however, was happily healed by the re-union of the two Scottish Synods, in 1820. After all the dispute, it was discovered that it was contrary to the Bill of Rights, to enforce the oath. Magistrates had suffered it for a long time to fall into disuse; and a formal end was put to it, along with kindred nuisances, by the Reform Bill, enacted by the British Legislature, in 1832.

Our fathers—where are they? The prophets—do they live for ever? The time drew nigh, when this servant of Christ must die. Nor did death find him unprepared. For some time he had been employed in composing his Scripture Songs. When that work was finished, he expressed to Mrs. Erskine his persuasion, that he would not long remain. He continued in the active discharge of duty, till he was seized with a violent nervous fever, of which he died on the eighth day, on Mon-

day, the 6th of November, 1752, in the 42d year of his ministry, and the 68th year of his age. His last sermons were from Prov. iii. 17—"Her ways are ways of pleasantness," and from Job, xix. 15—"I know that my Redeemer liveth." Among his last words, he was heard to say, "I will be for ever a debtor to free grace." His last words were, "victory! victory! victory!!"

We have seen that Ralph Erskine was a powerful preacher. It was no unusual thing for an assembly to be dissolved in tears, under his ministry. It is impossible to calculate the numbers that owed to him, under grace, their conversion and consolation. Would ministers learn the great secret of his power? Let them peruse the following passage, which Mr. Fraser gives from his diary. "This morning, being obliged, I studied and preached: though unprepared, I was helped in studying and preaching. I found my heart, indeed, to trust in Jesus, and cast the work upon him; and accordingly found him taking the burden of the work off my heart, and then sustaining and strengthening in public praying and preaching, as remarkably as ever, if not more than ever before. I preached from a heart, as it were, full of Christ, and of a desire to win souls to him. The Lord was with me in the closet, and with me in the tent. I preached before my brother Ebenezer, and many went away with the conviction that God was in the place."

The published sermons of Ralph Erskine fill ten volumes, octavo. They have for a century been relished by the pious and judicious. They labour under the disadvantage of being too long, of having too many discourses on one text, and of being perplexed by a multiplicity of subdivisions. But they contain the very marrow of gospel truth and christian experience. They abound in passages containing the most happy illustrations of doctrine, skilful delineations of the workings of the heart, and powerful addresses to all varieties of cases, circumstances, and experiences. Sermons which called forth the admiration of such men as Hervey, Toplady, and Bradbury, are not to be lightly esteemed. In addition to the extensive circulation which numerous editions of them have obtained in England, Ireland, and Scotland, they have been translated, together with the sermons of his brother Ebenezer, into Welsh and Dutch—and are as in eager request at this day in Holland as they are in Scotland. These sermons deserve the attention of students, preachers, and divines, as well as private christians, of the present day. The late celebrated Dr. Mason, of New York, said that, when a boy, he took the sermon entitled,

“Faith’s Plea upon God’s Word,” “to the garret of his residence, and read, and wept, and prayed.”

The Gospel Sonnets have passed through a vast number of impressions. They are, in general, homely—yet contain various passages of power and beauty. They are full of excellent divinity, and thousands have found them precious to their souls. Is that book to be despised, to which such a mind as that of Andrew Fuller, in giving an account of his first religious impressions, thus acknowledges his obligation—“I took up Ralph Erskine’s Gospel Sonnets, and opening upon what he entitles, ‘A Gospel Catechism for Young Christians,’ I read, and as I read, I wept. Indeed I was almost overcome with weeping; so interesting did the doctrine of eternal salvation appear to me.”

BEDE.

[We have exceeded the usual limits, by inserting the whole of the article from our valued Correspondent, *Bede*—an article which we strongly recommend to the attention of our readers.—EDIT.]

THE DUTY OF PRAYER.*

Embracing an Exposure of some of the Commonest Pretences for Neglecting Secret Devotion and Family Worship.

A PRAYERLESS christian seems to be almost a contradiction in terms; yet there are many prayerless persons to whom you could not offer a higher insult than to deny that they are christians. Many must plead guilty to the charge of restraining prayer before God. Can we suppose that they fully understand the nature of their conduct in neglecting to improve this important means of grace and salvation; or has not some deep and mysterious infatuation seized upon their minds? Truly the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

We are anxious to deal plainly, and to come home to the case of every reader. In restraining prayer before God, you are neglecting not only a duty, but what you have yourself solemnly acknowledged to be a duty. For such neglect there can be no solid reason, unless that which amounts to an absolute physical necessity. Were this necessity laid upon you, it would, of course, exempt from all blame: but when there is no such necessity, (and we shall be able to prove that

* See Whyte on the Duty of Prayer.

it rarely, if ever, exists) guilt fastens down on your soul, and you verily stand condemned in the sight of God, however plausible may be your excuses for remaining prayerless, and however they may satisfy your own depraved heart, or meet the approbation of a sinful world. This will show you the object of the present article:—it is, to furnish an exposure of pretences for neglecting the duty of prayer, of which people who are called christians do not hesitate to avail themselves, particularly when pressed on the subject of family worship.

I. It is *pretended* that prayer is vain, on account of the fixedness and immutability of God's arrangements. This pretence weighs mightily with ignorance and sloth; and even grave philosophy has dared to put it forward as an objection to the doctrine of prayer. The objector alleges, that as all events have been arranged in the divine plan, and all take place according to a preordained order, it is foolish to imagine that any change can be effected in the "ways of God," through the intervention of our prayers: if he have determined to do us good, he will do so without supplication on our part: if he have determined otherwise, all our efforts cannot change him. Such is the apparently triumphant exception taken against the very foundation of prayer. The reader will observe that it is rather matter of philosophical speculation, than of practical difficulty. It betrays a mind either employed, or in a state of readiness for being employed, in creating *pretences*; and such a mind, when one of its creations is annihilated, will soon get up another. When we bring this specious objection to the test of every-day experience, it vanishes to its own world of shadows. God works by means. Under his Providence, the blessing is ordinarily connected with the use of means: and hence the great importance of prayer as a divinely established channel of communication with heaven.

We do not, however, shrink from meeting the objector on his own ground. We are willing to stand by the unchangeableness of the divine decrees; and we shall show that they support us in contending for the necessity of prayer. Jehovah will pour out his fury on the heathen, and on the families that call not on his name. From a variety of the most decided Scripture testimonies, and from the general tenor of the Bible, it is not difficult to discover that one decree of the King of Heaven is, that no prayerless person shall be admitted into the mansions of the redeemed. Let this be conceded, and our objector must concede it, and what becomes of the philosophic pretence for neglecting prayer? It is destroyed; and the duty

of prayer remains clear and delightful, and of eternal obligation: The divine arrangements, instead of obstructing, provide amply for its exercise, and afford the highest encouragement, in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make our requests known unto God. Phil. iv. 6.

We proceed to the exposure of other pretences, with which, alas! professing christians have a better practical acquaintance.

II. Want of necessary qualifications for conducting social or family worship, is with many a pretence for restraining prayer before God. How modest we all become when the affectation of modesty suits our purpose! The worship of God in our families is neglected; and it is, forsooth, pure humility, and an unfeigned distrust in our own powers, that prompt us to a perpetual violation of the command of heaven! It is observable, that those whose wonderful modesty is the alleged cause of their despising one of the richest privileges of the gospel, in other matters, evince no lack of confidence in their own abilities and attainments. This renders their pretence the more silly, and pulls off the mask of false modesty, with which they would conceal their disobedience to God.

But are any in earnest in pleading inability to conduct the interesting and profitable exercise of social worship? Reader, is this your situation? Then at what time, or in what way, do you expect that inability to be removed? There was a period when you knew nothing of the employment in which you are at present, pleasantly, and, it may be, profitably enough engaged—or nothing of the accomplishments in which you now excel, and which are at once useful and ornamental to society. By what means have you acquired knowledge, or arrived at the necessary expertness in any department of business, or in those arts which tend to alleviate the miseries of life, and to promote individual and social happiness? Was it by declining to make trial of your powers, and in opposition to all advice, standing upon the plea of your utter incapability; or was it not, on the contrary, by vigorous and well directed efforts, made with a willing mind? Let me beseech you, then, to adopt the same course in relation to family worship, and in God's name to persevere. Your first trials may not be successful. You may feel dissatisfied with yourself, and ready to abandon the duty in despair. But be not discouraged. Persist in the use of the means—seek divine assistance—on no account abandon this solemn duty: wait on God in your family; come with them to a throne of grace; away with the modesty which would prevent you from offering up, with your household, the morning and evening sacrifice; faint not—go on in the strength

of God the Lord; and surely his promises constitute more than a *peradventure* that you shall be ultimately successful.

III. Another *pretence* for restraining prayer before God, is the alleged want of inclination. It is considered sinful to engage in the duty at all, when the mind is void of desire, and the affections cold and lifeless, do not turn upon spiritual things. This, like the former pretence, has something specious in it, but it will not bear the scrutiny of a close examination. We admit most fully that it is sinful to mock God with the semblance of devotion, when there is no desire at the foundation of your prayers. But is prayer, on that account to be thrown aside? Whenever you feel disinclined to perform any duty, is the state of your minds—the reluctance of your desires, a sufficient reason for neglecting the duty? Unless you are prepared to go thus far, the pretence you employ will not serve the purpose. As heads of families, as brothers and sisters, as members of society at large, you are under obligations to discharge many duties to those with whom you stand connected: when you do not feel inclined to act your part, shall no blame attach to you, in the event of these duties being neglected? Will society receive this apology at your hands? They are not so stultified; they will hold you responsible for dereliction, and visit upon you the punishment which your conduct has deserved. Can it be supposed, then, that God will admit a similar apology, for restraining prayer before him? He will not—he cannot. So long as he continues to hate sin, and that will be to all eternity, the deed were impossible. Do you ask how is this? We reply—disinclination to what is good is sinful; therefore disinclination to prayer is sinful; if, then, you put it forward as an apology for neglect of prayer, you are simply making one sin, an apology for another; and this, we repeat, God will not and cannot admit. What is to be done in this difficulty? If you have not desires, can you not go, and with deep abasement confess the same unto God? This is the way of restoration to a right mind. You may come away from a throne of grace in a better and holier frame of spirit, than that with which you approached it. It has been observed of the immortal Luther, that he “never gave over praying, till he prayed his heart into the frame he prayed for.” God is able to incline your heart unto himself; plead with him to do so; the change will be an eminent blessing to yourself, and to your connexions in life. Devote to prayer the time which you are accustomed to employ in “making excuse,” and you will find more improvement.

IV. The pretence of many for restraining prayer is want of time. Let us examine this plea attentively. It may be desirable to analyse it, with the view of ascertaining the precise meaning attached to it by the objector. To those who use this pretence, we say—All your time is in the hand of God; and he can bring it to a close when he pleases. The world has claims on you—that will not be disputed—but God also has claims on you, whether you recognize them or not. What arrangements have you made for spending the days, and months, and years, which God is giving you? Is your time apportioned out on the principle of filling up every hour and every moment with worldly occupation? The world demands a certain share of your time; you grant the demand: it demands another; you grant it: it rises in its claims; you still meet them—until not a precious moment for attending to the salvation of your soul has escaped the avaricious grasp of the world. Then, of course, you are prevented by *necessary business* from worshipping God morning and evening in your families! Let me just entreat you to “remember and forget not” that this *worldly business* is rendered *necessary* by your own *worldly heart*. If not, go to God in prayer, and tell him that really the world is so important and engrossing, that you have not time for his service. Your actions, or rather your omissions, have told him so a thousand times; but you would shudder to express it in words. Well might Jehovah say to you in return—“You prize the world above me; *that* is evident from your conduct. Well, take it for your portion, and enjoy it; ‘Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone.’” Why should the world engross all your time, unless you esteem it more than the salvation of your soul?—The truth is, you endeavour first to satisfy the claims of the world, and should any time remain, you may perhaps devote it to God: whereas, if you would not hypocritically wear the christian name, you ought to seek **FIRST** the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof.

But you must be hurried, if in the morning you should attend to family worship; and better, you conceive, to neglect that solemn duty altogether, than to discharge it in a hurried manner. We will admit the force of your objection, if you will be good enough to extend it to your ordinary meals. You are often hurried in taking your food; better to neglect it altogether! You demur at this conclusion, while your own is far more unreasonable. It is not the length of time spent in the exercise, but the working of the heart in throwing off burning

desires, that constitutes devotion in the sight of God. Our concluding remark here is this, and of its truth we are convinced in our souls, that did you only value family worship aright, you would find time for its performance.

V. Some have objected to prayer on the pretence, that it is a grovelling exercise.

It has been asserted, that men of gigantic intellect have spurned religion in general, and devotional exercises in particular, as calculated only for those of humble capacity and uncultivated taste. Granting that this objection contains a true statement, still it is not valid; for even the bitterest prejudice must equally admit, that persons of the most extensive views; sons of learning and genius, have insisted on christianity, and on prayer, an essential part of christianity, being necessary to the promotion of man's best interests in time and in eternity. Besides, what avails man's opposition to what God has commanded? Were all the world—philosophers, sceptics, infidels, professing christians, Jews, Mahomedans, Pagans, bond and free—aye, and in addition to these, were all the myriads of angels and archangels, cherub and seraph, of orders numbered or infinite, in common with the tribes of earth and hell; were the hosts of heaven itself, “by some strange frenzy driven,” to declare against prayer, on the ground of mistaking its humility for degradation, its elevating submissiveness, for spiritless slavery,—were they all under the influence of the pride which hurled Satan as lightning from heaven, to impress upon the exercise of devotion their stamp of ignominy, we should feel perfectly warranted in attaching no more weight to their joint testimony, than we do to the ravings of Bedlam. Why? Because whatever may be the aggregate of their wisdom and understanding, though it may be represented by mountains piled on mountains, it is yet as nothing and vanity, when placed in competition with the eternal mind, and the eternal wisdom of Deity. GOD has sanctioned prayer. The first intellect in the universe has written his approbation of it in characters of light. The mind from which all other mind is derived, and in comparison with which it is all as a drop to the ocean, as nought to infinity, views prayer as an important means of securing man's moral exaltation, and of conferring on him true dignity and glory. So far, then, as intellect, mind, genius, is concerned, we care not for the disapprobation of men or devils, since God, the fountain of intelligence, has graciously instituted prayer, in subserviency to the promotion of his own glory and our salvation.

The case, however, is far indeed from being so favourable to our opponents as we have supposed it to be. Our object was to show that the objection, in the utmost strength which even possibility confers on it, can be triumphantly answered. Let us now look to the matter as it stands. It is not true that a preponderance of intellect has ranged itself on the side of infidelity. It is not true that philosophers of the first-rate eminence have advocated the cold and heartless system which would prohibit all intercourse between the Creator and his dependent children. No. The master-minds in science and philosophy, under whose guidance, truth has been investigated most splendidly and most successfully, have loved religion. Look to Bacon, the father of the true system of philosophy not only in Britain, but in the world—Bacon, one of the lights of knowledge, who did more to advance the cause of learning than the whole herd of infidel philosophers taken together, and say what was his testimony to the power and importance of religion. “It is true,” said he, “that a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to Atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion; for while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no farther: but when it beholdeth the chain of them, confederate, and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity.” And again—“Man when he resteth and assureth himself upon divine protection and favour, gathereth a force and a faith, which human nature in itself could not obtain;” otherwise, human nature is deprived of the means of exalting itself “above human frailty.” On the same side, we find, also, in our own country, such men as Newton and Boyle; and on the Continent, Boerhaave and Euler—men whose names will go down with lustre to the remotest posterity: these men have demonstrated, that it is sound wisdom to connect philosophy with devotion; and the light of genuine piety has shed a brighter effulgence on their most glorious discoveries, whilst they presented them all as an offering upon the altar of God. Let not, therefore, our mere smatterers in the floating literature of a superficial age, pretend to any superiority of wisdom in rejecting revelation, and neglecting the prayerfulness which it enjoins. They sadly expose their own ignorance. The mightiest bulwarks of philosophy stand ready for the defence of religion. Her batteries have often poured a murderous fire on the enemies of divine revelation. Let not the young recruit mistake her banner. Ranging himself on the side of infidelity, or of a frivolous neglect of

devotional religion, he cannot be supplied with weapons from the armoury of true philosophy. Our conclusions from such statements are the following—

1. That half-witlings, and would-be philosophers, are furnishing a miserable exhibition of their own folly and ignorance, not to speak of depravity, when they talk slightly of prayer to God, that instrument of unspeakable good to the souls of men—of prayer to God, without which there is not a hope of redemption held forth in the everlasting gospel.

2. That you, reader, and I will be found verily guilty at last, if in secret, in the family, or in public, we restrain prayer before God, knowing, as we do, its unspeakable importance, and having so many encouragements to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Heb. iv. 16.

WICLIF.

REVIEW.

LIFE and DIARY of the Rev. RALPH ERSKINE, A.M., one of the Founders of the Secession Church, by DONALD FRASER, Minister of the United Associate Congregation, Kennoway, Fifeshire. Edinburgh: Published by William Oliphant and Son. Sold by Hugh Rea, 17, Waring-street Belfast. 12mo. pp. 564.

MEN die, but their influence survives. They stand before the bar of God to receive according to their deeds; but their good or evil remains behind them, and the effects of their conduct are every day secretly shaping the movements of a generation from which they have passed away. Good men transmit to after times an inheritance of wisdom and example, of enterprise, exertion, and labour, more valuable, by far, than any accumulation of worldly property. Eminent characters communicate to the minds of their contemporaries an impulse, which, like the circling undulation on the surface of the lake, is continually expanding outwards from the centre in every direction; and which, by thus acting upon others, puts into operation an endlessly diversified succession of causes and consequences, which go on multiplying and extending to the day of judgment. What an influence have the minds and acts of Abraham, Moses, Paul; of Luther, Calvin, Latimer, Knox, Whitfield, and a multitude of like glorious spirits, been exert-

ing in time past, and are, at this moment, exerting on the minds, the conduct, and the destiny of vast multitudes of the human race. All who know the history of the church in Scotland, during the last century—who value the doctrines of grace—who sympathize with the honest and intrepid struggles of an obnoxious and persecuted few in the cause of reformation, and that, too, with the pride, power, and passions of overwhelming majorities and multitudes, bearing like a tide, against them, will consider the Erskines, and other founders of the Secession Church, entitled to the veneration and gratitude of posterity. Their names—their work—their influence, live this day, not only in the stronghold which the Secession Church has afforded for the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, and the rights and liberties with which Christ has made his people free; but, also, in reviving within the Scottish Establishment itself, a spirit, which, it is hoped, will go on completely to restore the doctrines of grace to all its pulpits, overthrow the antichristian law of lay patronage, and ultimately effect its entire regeneration.

The Erskines commenced their career during the midnight of the Church of Scotland. A professor of Divinity had openly denied our Lord's Deity, and original sin. The Scottish pulpit was poisoned with legalism. Christian congregations had been deprived of the right of choosing their own pastors. Presbyteries were in the practice of ordaining ministers in direct opposition to the will of the people, sometimes not without the aid of military force. To gag and put down every man who had the courage and honesty to open his mouth against such atrocious proceedings, the General Assembly enacted, that no protest should be recorded on its minutes, and actually refused to hear a petition from the Christian people with 1700 signatures, praying for a redress of crying grievances. The propagators of Arian, Pelagian, Arminian, and legal error, were connived at or protected, while the advocates of truth and reformation, were subjected to all manner of annoyance, calumny, and persecution. In short, a domineering party in the General Assembly, were pursuing a headlong course of apostacy, subversive of evangelical truth, presbyterial order, and of christian rights and liberty.

When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him. At this crisis the Secession arose. The biography of its founders will not only be read with interest by the members of that communion, but by all of every denomination, who love truth better than sect,

and who possess that genuine liberality which is prepared to admire excellence and reformation wherever they are seen.

We rejoice that the Erskines have found such an able biographer as the Rev. Donald Fraser. His life of Ebenezer Erskine is already well known. Encouraged by the success of that work, he has matched it by the life of Ralph, and the book is now before us. The author is a great-grandson of Ralph Erskine, and a worthy minister of the United Secession Church of Scotland. While he writes of the Secession, and of his illustrious ancestor, with a "con amore," which must ever give life and zest to a performance; he does so, with a candour, an impartiality, and a christian spirit, which, by hindering the book from degenerating into a disgusting eulogium, or a mere party production, will render it pleasing to christian minds of other churches. The events of Ralph Erskine's life are detailed with clearness, precision, and vigour. The whole is enriched with copious extracts from Mr. Erskine's private diary, which must be considered as exhibiting the honest workings of his mind, in relation to the scenes of private duty, and of public life, through which he passed. These extracts are invaluable. They bear the impress of a spirit, active, honest, benevolent, intrepid, conscientious—deeply pious and prayerful. These, together with the record of his life, presented in these pages, cannot fail, under the divine blessing, to stamp on the minds of the present generation, the likeness of that spirit which Erskine inherited from the Calvins and Knoxes of former days. And of what immense importance is it, that the spirit of the good, and wise, and reforming of other days, should be transmitted to their descendants, as well as the history of their deeds. Not only will their memories be thus blessed, and their venerable names held in everlasting remembrance, but what is of far greater consequence, their spirit, their influence, and their work, like the mantle of the ascending prophet, will be handed down to their successors. We, who call ourselves their children, shall be so in mind and works, as well as in name. We shall be free from the guilt of building and garnishing their sepulchres, from no higher principles than mere clannishness of sectarian spirit, and blind idolatry for the names and memories of great men; and they, instead of beholding us practically hating and resisting the work of God in which they were engaged, will find their work and spirit perpetuated in us, and thus live over again in a right hearted posterity. Thus, one generation shows the work of Christ to another, and declares the mighty things

which he has done for his church and cause; they make known the glory of his kingdom; his name is praised; his power felt, and his religion propagated and transmitted from race to race, and from age to age. "*This shall be written for the generation to come; and the people which shall be created, shali praise the Lord.*"

One general remark more, suggested by this interesting volume, and we have done. This book is far from representing Erskine and his associates as faultless. As individuals and as public characters, they had their defects and their mistakes. The sanctification of the best is imperfect; and as there is not individual or private, so there is no collective or official perfection. The breach respecting the Burgess Oath, we regard, not only as painful and deplorable, but as involving sin in both parties. As followers of the good and great of former times, while we aspire to resemble them, we should also shun their errors, and improve upon their excellencies, instead of resting short in servile inferiority. Their lives and opinions we must bring to the test of the Sacred Oracles; for the Bible is given as directly and immediately to us, as it was to them. Implicit faith—a slavish submission to mere human authority, is not a Protestant, but a Popish principle. As we should not be always merely inquiring into the truth, but established and growing up in it, so we should not be always mere distant copyists of our reforming and covenanting forefathers; we should aim, not only to revive, but to carry out and complete the work of reformation, for which they did and suffered so much. One generation should not only receive the privileges transmitted from another, but endeavour to rise beyond it. In comparison with the men of the millennium, we are babes. Then the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun as seven days. Why, then, should not the advances of generation above generation, in light, and love, and works, be as the light shining more and more unto the perfect day? On this principle, why should not we strive, not only to imitate, but to equal and surpass the Erskines, Rutherfords, Knoxes, Calvins, and the other lights and glories of departed generations; just as the least in Christ's millennial kingdom, shall be greater than both we and they. Is not the word of God before us as it was before them; and is not the Spirit of God as mighty now, as in the years of ancient times, or as when effecting the moral glories of the coming millennium? We are sick of vain boasting about our fathers—our fathers, those giants of the olden time, as if we were

doomed by some irresistible destiny of fate, to a necessary, pigny inferiority. As generation succeeds generation, light and privileges are accumulating, and with the accumulation of advantages and of means, obligation must also proportionably accumulate. Why, then, should not we, the children of God's church, in this highly favoured age, aspire to have it said of us, in the way of eulogy, "The Reformers were the *harbingers* of such men," as it is said too often as an empty boast, "We are the descendants of the Reformers;" just as the Jews said, "We have Abraham for our father," when they were strangers to his faith and works. "I am weary," said Cornelia, addressing her sons, "with being called the daughter of Scipio; do something to make me named the mother of the Gracchi." We have had Reformers for our fathers; this is well—but there has been boasting enough on this head; let us, in God's strength, do something to make us be called the **HARBINGERS OF THE MILLENNIUM.**

We have been much pleased and edified by Mr. Fraser's life of Ralph Erskine; and we cordially recommend it as an excellent and useful piece of biography. We would advise that this, together with the Life of Ebenezer Erskine, should be placed in congregational libraries. All denominations may do this with satisfaction, as they are written in an enlarged and christian spirit; for the true way of viewing such men, and writing of such men, is not to contemplate them in the narrow and exclusive light of sect, but as the property of the Church general, which, as a whole, is served and benefitted by that which serves and benefits, in any place, or in any degree, one of its sections, or one of its congregations; and let Christ have the glory of all. To the members of the Secession Church, in particular, these works will suggest abundant materials of thankfulness, and ample stimulus to energy—to revival—to reformation—to work the works of Christ—to have fervent charity among themselves, and abound in love one to another and toward all men. "*Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end shall greatly increase. For inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (for we are but as yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow;) shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?*"

BEDE.

NECESSITY OF INCREASED MISSIONARY EXERTION ON BEHALF OF THE WEST INDIES.

If missionary exertions in the West Indies are delayed, the extent of the work to be accomplished will be greatly increased. The black and coloured inhabitants of the West Indies amount at present to upwards of 700,000; and though hitherto their numbers have diminished, instead of increasing, yet, considering the fertility of these islands, and the improvement of the negroes in a state of freedom, it would not be wonderful, if in half a century they should increase to two millions. In 1790, the slave population of the United States of America was 694,280. In 1830, a distance of only 40 years, it had increased to 2,010,436; and this immense augmentation of their numbers, was owing chiefly to the natural increase of mankind, and that under all the evils of slavery. Now, should the West Indies be neglected at present, how greatly will the work to be effected have augmented in the course of fifty years, when, instead of 700,000 souls, 2,000,000 will require to be cared for! We have a striking example of the evil of delay in the case of Ireland. Had the same moral machinery which is now in operation been set on foot at the commencement of the reign of George III. how powerful might have been its effects compared with what they can now be expected to be! Then it had to operate on a population of perhaps not more than 3,000,000; now it has to operate on a population of nearly 8,000,000*. We have lost the favourable moment for evangelizing Ireland. Let us not also lose the favourable moment for evangelizing the West Indies.

The negroes in the West Indies show a particular disposition to receive the gospel. In the West Indies there are more converts to Christianity *than in all the rest of the heathen world put together.* There are nearly sixty thousand negroes and people of colour connected with different missions as members of their churches or societies. The singular disposition which the negroes manifest to embrace the Gospel, is a powerful argument for more extended exertions among them.

Missions among the Negroes will probably be attended with only a temporary expense. Missionary societies were

* In 1767, the population of Ireland was estimated at 2,544,276, (*Edin. Encyclop.* vol. xii. p. 295): we have allowed about half a million more. In 1831, it amounted, according to the *Census*, to 7,734,365.

not formed with the view of *permanently* supporting the Gospel in any country; they calculate on the people among whom it takes root, providing for its maintenance and further extension among themselves. Among the negroes in the West Indies, a considerable disposition has been manifested, even while in a state of slavery, to contribute to the support of the Gospel among themselves; and after the act of emancipation takes effect, we may hope that their ability, as well as their disposition to do so, will be vastly increased.—*Missionary Register.*

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.

A NUMBER of ministers were assembled for the discussion of difficult questions, and among others it was asked, how the command, to pray without ceasing, could be complied with? Various suppositions were started, and at length one of the number was appointed to write upon it, and read at the next meeting: which being overheard by a plain, sensible servant girl, she exclaimed,—What, a whole month wanted to tell the meaning of that text? It is one of the easiest and best texts in the Bible. Well, well, said an old minister, Mary, what can you say about it? Let us know how you understand it; can you pray all the time? O yes, Sir. What, when you have so many things to do? Why, Sir, the more I have to do, the more I can pray. Indeed, well Mary, do let us know how it is: for most people think otherwise. Well, Sir, said the girl, when I first open my eyes in the morning, I pray, Lord open the eyes of my understanding; and while I am dressing, I pray that I may be clothed with the robe of righteousness; and when I have washed me, I ask for the washing of regeneration; and as I begin work, I pray that I may have strength equal to my day; when I begin to kindle up the fire, I pray that God's work may revive in my soul; and as I sweep out the house, I pray that my heart may be cleansed of all its impurities: and while preparing and partaking of breakfast, I desire to be fed with the hidden manna, and the sincere milk of the word; and as I am busy with the little children, I look up to God as *my* father, and pray for the spirit of adoption, that I may be *his* child—and so on, all day, every thing I do furnishes me with a thought for prayer. Enough, enough! cried the old divine, these things are revealed to babes, and often hid from the wise and prudent. Go on Mary, said he, pray without ceasing, and as for us, my brethren, let us bless the

Lord for this exposition, and remember that He has said, the meek will he guide in judgment.

The essay as a matter of course, was not considered necessary after this little event occurred.—*Baptist Repository*.

THE CHRISTIAN HERALD.

THIS is a monthly periodical, published in Edinburgh. It is ably conducted, and has reached the 26th Number of a *Third Series*. The profits of the work are given to the Congregational Fund for widows and decayed ministers. From the variety of interesting matter contained in the two numbers lying before us, we select the fragments entitled the "Student's Note Book."

Truth can only be discovered by peaceful minds: it is only adopted by kindred spirits. If it change the opinions of men, it is only by insensible gradations—a gentle and easy descent conducting them to reason. The revolutions caused by the progress of truth are always beneficial to society, and are only burdensome to those who disown and oppress it.—

Du Marsais.

Power of Music. 1 Sam. xvi. 14. 16. 23. Philip, king of Spain, was so wretched by melancholy, that he refused to be shaved or to appear in public. His queen engaged the celebrated Furinelli to sing one of his best airs, in an apartment adjoining the king's. His majesty's attention was roused, and he was so delighted that he called Furinelli into his presence, and promised him whatever he might request. He respectfully desired that his majesty might permit his attendants to shave and dress him. He consented; his disorder abated daily through the application of the same remedy, and a perfect cure was at length the result. This case of Philip bears an analogy to that of Saul, king of Israel.

Psalm cxix. 11. Thy word—I did eat it. The Tartars of the Crimea were formerly remarkable for their sagacity; to express which, the Turks said of them, that other nations have their wisdom in books; but the Tartars have eat their books; and hence, it was hid in their breasts, out of which it proceeds when they open their mouths.

The Sabbath. Intrench not on the Lord's day to use unlawful sports; *this were to spare thine own flock, and to sheere God's Lamb.* THOMAS FULLER.

The Honourable Purpose. The poet George Herbert enjoyed the most flattering prospects of political honours. His friends urged him to pursue them. He replied, “I will labour to make the name of a priest honourable, by consecrating all my learning, and all my poor abilities, to advance the glory of that God who gave them—knowing that I can never do too much for Him, that hath done so much for me as to make me a Christian.”

Popish Consistency. The celebrated artist, Benvenuto, could not be induced by threatenings or flattery, to give Pope Clement VII. a particular chalice. At length, the holy father, to secure his honour, only desired to have it sent sealed up in a box, which he pledged his honour not to open. The pope, however, had not the resolution to resist his curiosity to see, what the governor of Rome informed him was an extraordinary work. His apology for breach of faith is memorable. “Tell Benvenuto, that Roman Pontiffs have authority to loose and bind things of much greater importance than this.” While he uttered these words, he, with an angry look, broke open the box.

The Spirit of Sectarianism. Howell, a distinguished writer of the 17th century, was remarkable for zealous attachment to the form of religion in the English Church. He prayed thrice a-day, fasted twice a-week, and was in other respects equally devout. “Being of a lay profession, I humbly conform,” he says, “to the constitution of the church and my spiritual superiors; and I hold this obedience to be an acceptable service to God. Difference of opinion may work a disaffection in me, but not a detestation; I rather pity than hate a Turk and Infidel; if I hate any, it is those schismatics that puzzle the sweet peace of our church, so that I could be content to see an Anabaptist go to hell on a Brownist’s back.”

“I HAVE DONE GIVING.”

A GENTLEMAN of respectability, and a member of the church, made this remark the other day, when informed that an application was about to be made to him in behalf of some charitable object. “I have done giving,” said he. When I heard this remark it awakened in my mind a train of reflection, which I have thought it might not be amiss to communicate through some religious paper.

Done giving! Has he indeed? Why? Has he given

all? Has he nothing left to give? Has this disciple done what his master did? Was he rich, and has he become poor for the sake of others, that they, through his poverty, might be rich?—Oh no! he is rich still. He has the greatest abundance—more than enough to support him in elegance, and to enable him to leave an ample inheritance to his children. What if he has given a great deal? He has not only not impoverished himself, but is probably richer now, through the favour of Providence, than he would have been had he never given any thing. Now, if, by honouring the Lord with his substance, his barns, instead of being emptied, have been filled with plenty, he had better continue this mode of honouring him. He should rather increase than arrest his liberality.

Done giving? Why? Is there no more need of giving? Is every want abundantly supplied? Is the whole population of our country furnished with the means of grace? Is the world evangelized? Have missionaries visited every shore? Is the Bible translated into every language, and distributed in every land—a copy in every family—and every member of every family taught to read it? Are the accommodations for poor widows and orphans as ample as they should be? Have the ceased from the land? Oh no, there are no such good reasons as these for ceasing to give. Why, then, has he done giving? Is it because others do not give as they ought? But what is that to him? Will he make the practice of others his rule of conduct, rather than the precept of Jesus Christ? If others do not give, so much the more should he. Will he add another name to the list of niggards?

Does he feel worse for having given away so much? Has it made him unhappy? Is his experience different from that of the Lord Jesus, who said, "It is more *blessed* to give than to receive."

Has he, who thinks he will give no more, been led to that conclusion, by having found that what has been given hitherto has done no good? And is it so, that no good has been done by all the bibles published, and all the tracts distributed, and all the missionaries sent abroad into our own land, and into the world; and all the schools established, and all the children taught to read, all the civilization introduced, and all the asylums opened, and all the poverty relieved? Has no good been done? Good, great good has been done by what has been given; but still more will be done by what shall be given hereafter. Bibles can now be printed at a cheaper rate than heretofore, and the conductors of our charitable operations

have learned by experience that economy which can be learned in no other way. And yet, at this time, when a little money goes so far in doing good, here is a man who says, "I have done giving."—*Philadelphian*.

INTELLIGENCE.

BIBLE SOCIETY.—In the month of June last, a Society was formed for the more effectual dissemination of the word of God, in the Parishes of Maralin, Moira, and Donaclooney. It now exists as a branch of the Hibernian Bible Society, and has already been much blessed, as an instrument in circulating the Holy Scriptures, at a very cheap rate, and gratuitously, in some cases, in these parishes. On Sabbath, the 2d of February, a Sermon was preached in its behalf, and a collection taken up in the Presbyterian Secession Congregation of Donaclooney, by Rev. John Rogers, of Glascar. Many of those called to contribute on the occasion, had before become subscribers to the Society. The collection amounted to a sum between nine and ten pounds, and was, next day, handed over to the Society, at a meeting of its Committee.

DIED, at New-York, on the 2d November, 1833, the Rev. Francis Pringle, in the 85th year of his age, and the 61st of his ministry. He was a native of Fifeshire, Scotland, and was ordained minister of the Presbyterian Secession Congregation of Gilnahirk, near Belfast, in the year 1772. In the year 1798, he removed to Scotland; shortly afterwards, he emigrated to America, and was settled at Carlisle, where he exercised his ministry, in connexion with the Secession Church, for upwards of 30 years. He resigned his pastoral charge in 1832, and resided until his death with his eldest and only surviving son, Thomas Pringle, Esq., New-York. Such was the estimation in which he was held, that he was appointed to the clerkship of the Synod of which he was a member, both in Ireland and in America.

His son, Mr. Pringle, thus writes to his friends in this country, respecting the last days of his venerable father—"During all his confinement, a murmur was never heard from his lips. Often did he use the language of gratitude towards his heavenly father, and the language of deep humility in reference to himself. He manifested an unshaken trust in that Redeemer whom he had loved and served during his protracted life. And surely if a life of faith and holiness leads to a blessed end, his was that end."

In the 79th year of his age, Mr. James Brown, an elder in the Presbyterian Secession Congregation, of Island Magee.

As a member of civil society, he was upright in his dealings, and cherished good will to all men. As a private christian, he delighted in the word of God and prayer. As a member and officer of the church, he was conscientious in the maintainence of its discipline, and exemplified strict regard for the sacredness of the Sabbath, and constantly attended on the public worship of God, and the preaching of the gospel. At the close of his last illness, an anxious relative, watching by him, marked an expression of earnestness in his countenance, and inquired whether he wished for any thing. "I have a desire," he replied, "to depart and to be with Christ."